

INTRODUCTION

Wildland fire management within National Park Service units is conducted to support resource management objectives. The full range of strategic options is available to managers provided selected options do not compromise firefighter and public safety, cost-effectiveness, benefits, and values to be protected. Suppression of unwanted, potentially environmentally damaging wildland fires is guided by fire management plan direction. Fire use activities may include using fire as either a natural process or as a management tool. Fire use objectives include, but are not limited to: restoring, mimicking, or replacing the ecological influences of natural fire, maintaining historic scenes, reducing hazardous fuels, eliminating exotic/alien species, disposal of vegetative waste and debris, and preserving endangered species.

OBJECTIVE

Wildland fire management policy and procedures are changing to reflect new considerations, capabilities, and direction, while being responsive to resource management objectives. A 1995 review of federal wildland fire policy ([Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy and Program Review USDI/USDA 1995](#)) ([WPFMP-Ch2](#)) provides a new policy incorporating the full range of wildland fire management actions. The 1995 Report provides nine guiding principles that are fundamental to the success of the Federal wildland fire management program and implementation of review recommendations. It also recommends a set of thirteen Federal wildland fire policies in the areas of: safety, planning, wildland fire, prescribed fire, preparedness, suppression, prevention, protection priorities, interagency cooperation, standardization, economic efficiency, wildland/urban interface, and administration and employee roles.

The success of these recommendations and policy implementation depends upon actions and expectations both internal and external to federal agencies. Agencies must ensure that wildland fire management is fully integrated into land management planning. Every park superintendent must ensure that these policies are incorporated into all wildland fire management actions. Managers and staff personnel must actively embrace and implement the recommendations. Every employee of every agency must be committed to fully carry out implementation at the ground level. Agencies must change their expectations that all wildland fires can and should be controlled and suppressed. The public will then have a better understanding of what we are doing, why it is important to them, and be more open to accept short-term inconveniences of some implementation impacts of the new policy. Absolute protection is an expectation that is difficult, if not impossible to achieve, and based on federal workforce limitations, fiscal constraints, and environmental and fire behavior variables, is unrealistic.

The Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy that now governs wildland fire management provides for a full range of responses and for the opportunity for all wildland fires to be

managed for resource benefits. This document can be found on the Internet at www.fs.fed.us/land/wdfire.htm.

All wildland fires not capable of supporting resource management will receive a suppression response.

The goals of the NPS wildland fire management program are to:

1. Conduct a vigorous and safe wildland fire management program with the highest professional and technological standards.
2. Identify the type of wildland fire that is most appropriate to specific situations and areas.
3. Efficiently accomplish resource management objectives through the application and management of prescribed and wildland fires.
4. Continually evaluate the wildland fire program operations and accomplishments to better meet program goals by refining treatment and monitoring methods, and by integrating applicable technical and scientific advancements.

REQUIREMENTS

There are consistent management requirements for all wildland fire management applications. These include measurable objectives, qualified personnel, quantified ranges of conditions under which naturally ignited fires will be managed or planned ignitions will be applied, a description of actions which will be taken if these conditions are exceeded, a monitoring and documentation process, and a review and approval process.

Wildland fire use is a desirable method to maintain fire-dependent ecosystems. In other areas where fire is an essential component of the ecosystem but cannot be allowed to burn as a natural process because of management constraints, prescribed fire is used to maintain the influence of natural fire or to restore the fuel characteristics to a condition more compatible with the eventual reintroduction of wildland fire.

Although there are risks associated with fire use, those risks are reduced by the implementation of the requirements contained in this reference manual. In addition, the failure to use wildland fire will often result in significant risks through the accumulation of wildland fuels, as well as long term ecological consequences incompatible with park and resource management objectives.

An approved fire management plan is required before a wildland fire management program can be fully implemented. The use of either prescribed fire or wildland fire or both for resource

benefits is expressly not permissible without an approved fire management plan. The need for wildland fire use must be described in the park's Resource Management Plan while specific fire use activities must be described in the park Fire Management Plan, which is approved by the park superintendent. The Superintendent approves implementation plans for all fire use activities.

NEPA COMPLIANCE REQUIREMENTS

(<http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/42/4321.html>)

Any fire use implementation activities will impact the surrounding environment and social and fiscal concerns of persons in the affected area. It is imperative that all fire use activities not cause unacceptable social, legal, or biological impacts within the park or adjacent to it.

An environmental assessment (EA) that meets current National Environmental Quality Council guidelines is required for all fire use programs. This should be part of a programmatic environmental assessment or environmental impact statement covering the park's wildland fire management program. This document is part of the Fire Management Plan, not the Resource Management Plan. The Resource Management Plan, however, must state that fire use is essential in the achievement of certain resource management objectives. The Fire Management Plan is derived from, and supports, the Resource Management Plan.

The Fire Management Plan must clearly state that an environmental analysis has been completed and includes any constraints or limitations imposed on the fire management program. Compliance requirements, which may be included in the analysis, are Section 106 of the [National Historic Preservation Act](http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/16/470.html) (<http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/16/470.html>) of 1966, Section 7 of the [Endangered Species Act](http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/16/668aa.html) (<http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/16/668aa.html>) (as amended in 1973), and Section 810 of the [Alaska National Interest Land Conservation Act](http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/16/3101.html) (<http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/16/3101.html>) of 1980. Additional compliance requirements may exist at the federal, state and local level.

Public involvement is an integral part of the planning process and should be commensurate with the level of public concern. A minimum 15-day public review period is mandated by NEPA.